



Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Local Government and ABS is a quarterly newsletter created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) aimed at helping the Local Government Sector use statistics to assist with planning and other community servicing decisions.

A specific aim of this newsletter is to help you easily find information on the ABS website. It explains the structure of the ABS website and provides direct electronic links to statistical series of use to local government. Electronic links are coloured and underlined and can be activated using the mouse button. Statistical terms are also explained to help make sense of more complex data.

Local Government and ABS provides a central contact point where you can provide your views and suggestions as to how the ABS can better assist Local Government.

We encourage you to forward this newsletter to others and post it on your bulletin board. Anyone is welcome to receive Local Government and ABS. To subscribe, just send an email to jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au with "subscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter please unsubscribe by sending an email to jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au with "unsubscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line.

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About ABS Catalogue Numbers

ABS publications, products and services have a 5-digit code (or number) which uniquely identifies each title. This 5-digit number is known as the **ABS Catalogue number**.

Help - ABS Catalogue Numbers explains the structure of the numbering system and the relationship to the various subject matter groupings.

Information in the **ABS Catalogue** arranged in catalogue number order so it is important to understand the classification structure to assist you find the data of interest to you.

Sometimes you may see a 10-digit number attached to a publication, product or service. The extra numbers indicate the medium of the release eg electronic releases. The first five digits of any ABS catalogue number will always follow the standard 5-digit code.

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Free ABS Email Notification Service

The ABS has developed a free Email Notification Service which alerts clients whenever there is a statistical release related to a topic in their area of interest.

Clients can register for the service from a link on the **ABS home page** under the Statistical Releases section. A product list with check boxes allows clients to register for one topic, many topics or all releases. For example, people who subscribe to 'Census statistical products and services' will be sent an email notification about any products released that day that start with the '20' ABS catalogue number. Clients can also unsubscribe from one or all releases and query their subscriptions.

If the product has a Main Features, the link in the notification email will be linked to Main Features. Alternately, if the product does not have a Main Features it will be linked to the ABS on-line catalogue entry. The email will also contain a link to the **forthcoming releases** and the ABS web site.

To use the service it's just a matter of ticking as many boxes as you like, enter your email address and push the subscribe button. You will then be sent a confirmation email, which must be returned to enable the ABS to activate the subscription. Querying and unsubscribing follow similar processes.

Enquiries regarding the email notification service should be sent through the Subscription Support link located at the bottom of the **email notification page** which will generate an email. A reply will be quickly forwarded back to you.

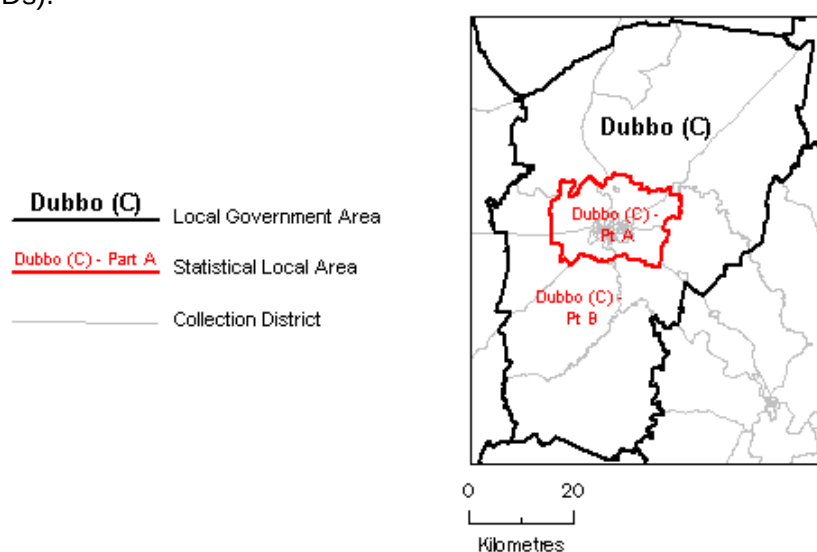
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The Australian Standard Geographical Classification and Local Government

Most people are aware that the ABS releases its statistics on a variety of geographic areas ranging from statistics for the whole of Australia down to Population Census data which relates to a few hundred households. What is much less understood is how these different geographic areas relate to each other.

The answer to this question lies in the classification structure the ABS uses to collect and release its data. It is called the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (ASGC) and is the basic dissemination framework for all ABS statistical collections. The framework divides Australia into manageable chunks that are flexible enough to meet both the nature of the statistics and the needs of users. Most of the geographical structures in the ASGC cover all of Australia, though this is by no means a hard and fast rule. The ASGC is updated every year.

There are 2 basic building blocks for the ASGC and all other geographical areas in the classification relate to one or other of these, and often both. These building blocks are Local Government Areas (LGAs) and Collection Districts (CDs).



Local Government Areas

LGAs, as the name suggests, are the areas administered by local governments or local councils. However, being a product of the political process, the boundaries are determined by the various state governments. The ABS, however, recognises these boundaries within its official classification.

As the LGA boundaries are not defined by the ABS, they do not always take into account the statistical and geographic needs of the ABS. The ABS therefore utilises an intermediate area to address this issue called the Statistical Local Area (SLA).

Given the unique nature of the LGA and SLA it is important that users understand the relationship between the two units. LGAs may comprise one or more SLAs. For example an LGA may be broken down into 2 SLAs, one encompassing the urban and the other the rural component of the parent LGA. SLAs can only be equal to, or smaller than LGAs and are contained wholly within the LGA boundary.

As LGA boundaries and names change, so the ABS changes the associated SLAs. The SLA boundaries are then aggregated to form higher-level structures within the ASGC. This LGA/SLA relationship is pivotal to the ABS and its role of facilitating the use of data by government at all levels on a comparable basis.

Differences in the structure of government means that some areas of Australia, such as the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), much of the Northern Territory and parts of the other states, are not covered by LGAs. These areas are called unincorporated areas. These areas, however, are still contained within the SLA structure. For instance, in the ACT the SLAs are suburb-based which allows for a meaningful disaggregation of the unincorporated area.

Apart from the Population Census which utilises the CD as the base unit, the SLA is the smallest area that most ABS data collections utilise for data dissemination.

Collection Districts

The CD is currently the smallest geographic area unit that the ABS uses both in data collection and dissemination. The CDs are defined every 5 years for the Census of Population and Housing. They equate to the area that one person covers in handing out and collecting Census forms. Typically they consist of 200-300 households in urban areas, but both the number of households and the bounded area of the CD varies.

CDs aggregate together to define all of the higher-level boundaries in the ASGC structures in Census years. CDs do not cross SLA (and consequently LGA) or State/Territory boundaries. At each Census the CD boundaries are redefined and realigned to the SLA, LGA and State/Territory boundaries. Where a CD does not share a boundary with an SLA, LGA or State, they are usually defined using boundaries that are typically based on geographic features that the collector on the ground can easily identify. These include roads, creeks, obvious property lines etc. Occasionally individual buildings such as high-rise apartment blocks will be defined as their own CD.

CDs and LGAs are the basic building blocks for the ASGC. In future articles you will be introduced to some of the higher-level structures within the ASGC and the specific roles they play within the ABS. In the meantime, the **Australian Standard Geographic Classification 2001** is available for viewing free of charge on the ABS Website.

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Building Approvals - Why they are important.

Have you ever wondered why the ABS hassles councils for Building Approval statistics each month?

Simply put, the building industry is regarded as one of the best guides to the health of the Australian economy. Each month, governments analyse the statistics published by the ABS, trying to comprehend what's really happening in the building industry, and by extension the Australian economy as a whole.

Our building statistics are also used to identify the main areas of population growth, on the assumption that where the population grows rapidly, the demand for services (transport, education, health, etc) will increase at a similar rate. They are also used as a component to estimate the population between each Census, which is used in the formula used by the Commonwealth to allocate funds to state and local governments each year.

Business uses building statistics in much the same way; trying to predict the level of demand for their products and services; monitoring trends in the use of different building materials; identifying the most

profitable locations for new retail outlets, and generally striving to stay one step ahead of both the consumer and their competitors.

All of these decision-makers rely on the ABS to produce accurate building statistics and we in turn depend on councils to provide high-quality, timely data for publication each month.

If you want to see the finished product, the Main Features are freely available on the ABS website and publications can be viewed free in either electronic or hardcopy form at your **local library**. Time Series data are also available on the ABS website, or through the ABS consultancy service by telephoning 1300 135 070.

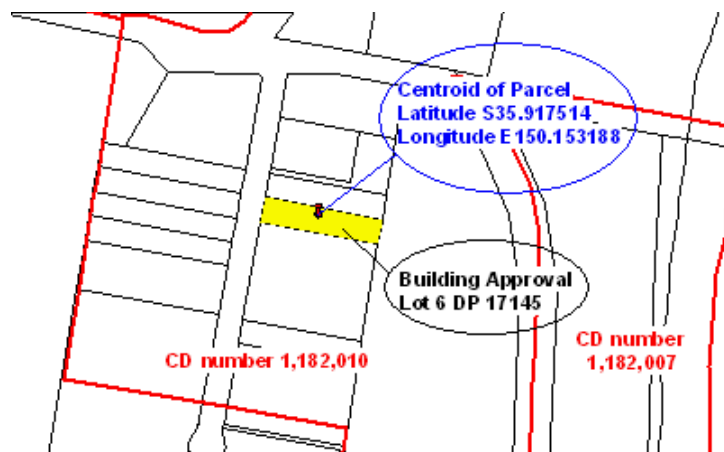
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Building Approvals and Geocoding

Estimating population change requires a detailed picture of exactly where building activity is occurring. That is why the ABS asks councils for detailed location information for each building approval. This allows the ABS to determine the Census Collection District (CD) code for each approval, which is important information for the conduct of the five yearly Census and for population estimation between Censuses.

Some councils have been providing building approvals data to the ABS complete with the CD code for each record. Where councils have not provided this information, the ABS has attempted to work out the CD code based on the address of the site. However in rural and developing urban areas, a street address may not yet have been allocated and building approvals are often recorded against a lot and plan number for the land parcel rather than a street address. Determining the CD code for a large number of building approvals from inadequate street addresses has proven difficult and costly, and the ABS therefore decided to change its approach.

In late 2001, the ABS negotiated with the vendors of Local Government software to introduce a new file format (800V3) for building approvals reports produced for the ABS. This new format incorporates geocodes (aka coordinates of latitude and longitude) which uniquely locate any building site on the surface of the earth.



If your council has a Geographical Information System (GIS), then the latitude and longitude of the parcel can be output from the GIS for inclusion in the ABS report. The ABS would prefer to receive the latitude and longitude in the Australian Standard adopted by most States and Territories in 2001 (GDA 94). If you are not sure how this can be done then talk to your council's Land Information Systems officer or contact your GIS supplier.

Apart from the precision which geocodes offer in identifying the location of each parcel of land, their major advantage lies in their consistency. While CD boundaries are often adjusted after each Census based on changes in population, geocodes remain constant. Once a building approval has been allocated a geocode, then the ABS can use that information to determine the correct CD code with fewer resources and far greater accuracy than ever before. The end result is more accurate population estimates.

If you would like more information, please contact Keith Allen on 1800 811 017 (Toll Free).

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Trend, Seasonally Adjusted, Original - Looking at Time Series

Time series data enable us to assess how real world forces affect levels of social and economic activity over time. However, looked at on a period to period basis, these series are typically volatile, and to understand the underlying level of socioeconomic activity a smoothing mechanism is required. To assist users of ABS time series data to identify and analyse the underlying movement of the series, the ABS publishes trend estimates along with seasonally adjusted and original estimates. Increasingly, the main features section and commentaries concerning time series of ABS output emphasise the trend series, rather than the seasonally adjusted or original data.

The trend series is designed to reflect the longer term behaviour of the series. A comprehensive information paper - **"A Guide to Interpreting Time Series - Monitoring Trends"** (ABS cat. 1349.0) has been published on the ABS Website and is available free of charge. This Information Paper discusses the derivation and properties of the ABS trend estimates, and some of the practical considerations that must be taken into account when interpreting such estimates.

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What's happening in Local Government Finance

The ABS Local Government Statistics Unit (LGSU) has been doing considerable work with most state/territory agencies in developing combined collection instruments to lessen the burden on councils reporting annual financial data. A number of these forms have been finalised (and in some cases already sent to councils) with most others almost complete. Councils are encouraged to return their collection forms to their respective state agencies ASAP to assist in the compilation of timely statistics. The LGSU will undertake an evaluation of the process with the respective state agencies at the completion of the process to see where further improvements for council reporting may be made.

The LGSU has completed a Post Enumeration Survey (PES) of the ABS' Local Government Finance Statistics Quarterly Estimates survey. This PES involved a series of interviews with councils currently in the survey Australia-wide to look at issues such as evaluating the quality of data provided to the ABS and evaluating the Electronic Data Reporting (EDR) process and instrument. A number of recommendations from councils have been implemented to improve the quality and useability of the collection instrument. These recommendations will be incorporated into an improved form to be used commencing with the September '03 quarter.

In an effort to improve data quality and reduce the burden placed on councils, in '03-'04 the LGSU will be conducting a methodological review of this survey. In particular the ABS will be looking at the way the sample of councils in the survey is selected and may be improved. Any outcomes from that review will be implemented in the September '04 quarter. The LGSU has made some minor changes to the sample for the September '03 collection by rotating some councils in/out of the survey to spread the burden currently being placed on councils.

The LGSU is currently running a project looking at the quality of the Local Government frame and, in particular, at the quality of frames currently being used in the ABS to select councils and other local government units for inclusion in various surveys. This project is expected to be completed in December '03. At present, there are a number of sources within the ABS for making such selections, and this project will be attempting to amalgamate, rationalise and centralise these. This should result in an improvement in data quality and also make for more representative selections of local government units in ABS surveys. In particular this project will be looking at the treatment of Indigenous councils and Public Non-Financial Corporations (PNFCs).

The ABS has concluded the consultation phase of the development of the Local Government Purpose Classification (LGPC). The response received from the consultation was excellent with great interest shown from a range of users within the sector. The ABS has incorporated feedback received into the classification and is currently embarking on a formal internal ABS approval process. At this stage, it is expected that the classification will be approved and available for use in April 2004.

Contacts

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Links to previous editions of Local Government and ABS

Local Government and ABS Edition 2 June 2003
Local Government and ABS Edition 1 March 2003

Newsletter contact details

This newsletter is one way to help improve communication between the ABS and the Local Government Sector. New ABS initiatives to assist Local Government organisations will be announced in this newsletter as they evolve. We would like your views and suggestions about this newsletter so that it remains useful and assists you to understand and use ABS statistics. Please email comments to the Local Government Sector Account Manager, jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au or telephone (08) 82377621

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